“City-States in Mesopotamia”

Setting the Stage: Two rivers flow from the mountains of what is now Turkey, down through Syria and Iraq, and finally to the Persian Gulf. Six thousand years ago, the waters of these rivers provided the lifeblood that allowed the formation of farming settlements. These grew into villages and then cities. This pattern would also occur along other river systems in northern Africa, India, and China, as the world’s first civilizations developed.

Geography of the Fertile Crescent
A desert climate dominates the landscape between the Persian Golf and the Mediterranean Sea in Southwest Asia. Yet within this dry region lies an arc of land that provides some of the best farming in Southwest Asia. The region’s curved shape and the richness of its land led scholars to call it the Fertile Crescent.

Fertile Plains: In the eastern part of the Fertile Crescent, the Tigris (TY-grihs) and Euphrates (yoo-FRAY-teez) rivers flow southeastward to the Persian Gulf. (See the map on page 28.) Between them lies a plain that became known as Mesopotamia (MEHS-uh-puh-TAY-mee-uh), which in Greek means “land between the rivers.”

The Tigris and Euphrates rivers flooded Mesopotamia at least once a year. As the floodwater receded, it left a thick bed of mud called silt. In this rich, new soil, farmers could plant and harvest enormous quantities of wheat and barley. The surpluses from their harvests allowed villages to grow.

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